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AUTHOR Lea, H. Daniel; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A random sample of 152 faculty (76% return rate) at the University of Maryland, College Park completed a version of the Situational Attitude Scale - Commuter, which assessed their differential attitudes toward commuting versus resident students in a situational context. Data were analyzed by t-tests at the .05 level, and only 7 of 60 items were responded to differentially by faculty, which is what would be expected by chance. Thus, there is no evidence that faculty differentiate among students based on their residence. These results are in contrast to those found among student personnel staff, who tended to have more negative attitudes toward commuters than resident students. Possible reasons for the differences in responses of the faculty and student personnel staff are discussed, as are implications for students and past and future research on the topic. (Author/MSE)

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FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARD RESIDENT
AND COMMUTING STUDENTS

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Sponsored by the Office of Commuter Affairs, University of Maryland,
College Park

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FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARD RESIDENT AND COMMUTING STUDENTS

H. Daniel Lea, William E. Sedlacek & Sylvia S. Stewart

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Summary

A random sample of 152 faculty (76% return rate) at the University of Maryland, College Park completed a version of the Situational Attitude Scale - Commuter (SASC) which assessed their differential attitudes toward commuting versus resident students in a situational context. Data were analyzed by t-tests at the .05 level, and only 7 of 60 items were responded to differentially by faculty, which is what we would expect by chance. Thus, there is no evidence that faculty differentiate among students based on their residence. These results are in contrast to those found among student personnel staff, who tended to have more negative attitudes toward commuters than resident students. Possible reasons for the differences in responses of the faculty and student personnel staff are discussed, as are implications for students and past and future research on the topic.

INTRODUCTION

Faculty are among the most important elements of the college community who contribute to changes occurring in college students during the college years (Wilson, 1966). In Pygmalion in the Classroom, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) identified an alarming influence faculty may have upon student outcomes. In this study, teachers' preconceived expectations of student success or failure correlated highly with actual outcomes, implying subtle communication of teacher expectations to students resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although the study's impact has been lessened by methodological weaknesses (Thorndike, 1968) and lack of support in replication studies (Barber, 1969), it does serve to accentuate a need to look at the influence of faculty attitudes toward students. Indeed, since universities exist for the positive development of students, negative behaviors such as prejudice toward any group of students by any influential element of the university community should be of particular interest in the assessment of the impact of higher education upon the growth and development of its student clientele.

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) define prejudice or racism as behavior initiated toward an individual because of that person's group identity which results in negative outcomes for that individual. Since attitudes and behavior bear a functional relationship (Sherif and Sherif, 1956), prejudicial attitudes are important in that such attitudes may be indicative of a predisposition to prejudicial behavior. Sedlacek and Brooks (1972) have shown that prejudicial attitudes can be measured and have developed an instrument, the Situational Attitude Scale, to measure such attitudes. The SAS was constructed so as to make psychological withdrawal difficult, a pitfall of other instruments seeking to measure prejudice (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1970). Although constructed to measure racism, the SAS may be used to measure prejudicial attitudes toward a variety of groups and situations (Brooks, Sedlacek and Chaples, 1974; Forrer, Sedlacek and Agarie, (in

press; Hopple, 1976; Herman and Sedlacek, 1973). Investigation of racism can be extended to include sexism (Sedlacek, Brooks, Christensen, Harway, & Merritt, 1976) and commuterism (Foster, Sedlacek, Hardwick, & Silver, 1977). Sedlacek et al. suggest the emphasis should be upon the investigation of a prejudicial process which could be directed toward any group (1976).

A considerable amount of the research comparing commuter students to resident students puts commuters on the negative end of a "have to have-not" continuum when compared to resident students (Chickering, 1974; Astin and Panos, 1970; Chickering and Kuper, 1971; Kysar, 1964; Stark, 1965). The possibility that prejudice toward commuters could be a cause of the differential status of commuters, or a reaction to differences between commuters and residents, or a process by which commuters are construed as different is a moot question when viewed in the context of the primary goal of higher education - individual development of students (Sanford, 1962). Although the cause of commuterism needs to be examined, a more useful contribution to the positive development of commuter students at this point would be to identify commuterism where it exists; call attention to it; and take active steps to eliminate it rather than "explain it away."

Only one study appears in the literature dealing with prejudicial attitudes toward commuters. Foster, Sedlacek, Hardwick and Silver (1977), used an adaptation of the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) to identify the existence of prejudicial attitudes of student affairs professionals at a large public university toward commuting students. There are no studies of prejudicial attitudes of faculty toward commuters. The major purpose of this study is to seek to measure faculty attitudes toward commuters at a large public university.

PROCEDURE

A random sample of two hundred faculty at the University of Maryland at College Park were mailed one of two forms of the Situational Attitude Scale-

Commuter. The SAS contained six personal and social situations with each situation followed by ten bipolar semantic differential scales totaling sixty items. For this study, two forms of the SAS were used. The situations were the same on both forms except Form A had a term equivalent to commuter student inserted; Form B had a term equivalent to resident student inserted. Thus, although the situations were the same, the context differed. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of the forms, unaware that other forms existed (see Tables 1 and 2). A follow-up postcard was mailed to each participant three days after the initial mailing. Further follow-up was done by phone. Forms were completed anonymously, but a postcard was returned separately to indicate completion of the Scale.

RESULTS

Seventy-seven (77) commuter forms (Form A) and seventy-five (75) resident forms (Form B) were returned for an overall return rate of approximately 76%. Omission of more than 10% of the items resulted in the elimination of four (4) of Form A and seven (7) of Form B. Fifty-three (53) subjects were replaced in the sample. Thirty-four (34) were on leave or were no longer employed by the University. Nineteen (19), when contacted in follow-up calls, refused to participate in the study.

It was hypothesized that faculty would show more favorable attitudes toward resident students. The mean responses to each of the two forms were analyzed for significant differences at the .05 level by sixty t-tests. Using a non-directional hypothesis, seven items were found to be statistically significant. When sixty tests are run at the .05 level of significance, seven can be expected to be significant at the .05 level by chance alone (Sakoda, Cohen and Beall, 1954). Consequently, it can not be concluded from the data of this study that the faculty had differential attitudes toward resident or commuter students.

DISCUSSION

Before conclusions about the results can be reached based on the data of this study, some consideration should be given to problems in instrumentation and subject selection which were encountered and may have affected the outcome of the study. In order to help maximize return rate for a large sample, the investigators for the study shortened the SAS-Commuter used by Foster et al. (1977) by four situations (40 items). The situations used were those which appeared to be most valid for faculty, even though in Foster's study with student affairs professionals, these situations accounted for only five significant items which would support the hypothesis investigated in this study.

It should also be noted that participation in the study was voluntary. It is not known what effect responses from the fifty-three subjects who were replaced would have had on the results of the study. Many subjects also tended to add information to the situations to qualify their responses. It is uncertain how these attempts to change the stimuli may have altered the nature of their responses.

If faculty do not have differential attitudes toward commuters and resident students, as seems indicated in this study, there are both positive and negative implications for commuting students. If lack of differential attitudes means absence of prejudicial attitudes and possibly subsequent discriminatory behavior, the data here are indeed positive. Consequently, the Foster et al. findings (1977) that student affairs professionals express more negative attitudes toward commuters than toward resident students are even more alarming.

On the other hand, absence of differential attitudes does not necessarily imply positive outcomes for commuters. Most research about commuting students has found significant differences between commuters and residents. If these differences imply different needs, the data of this study may indicate a lack of awareness by faculty of the needs of commuters, especially if a student stereotype is based on the more traditional resident student model. Cross (1976)

has advocated that in this era of declining student enrollment and increased emphasis on accountability, higher education must move from education for all to education for each. Equal attitudes and behaviors toward different groups are not necessarily synonymous with a lack of prejudice. One must be concerned with the effect of one's attitudes or behaviors on individuals or groups (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976). Educators must ask, "Will my attitude or behavior enhance the growth and development of each student?" In this context, differential attitudes and behaviors are necessary rather than something to be avoided.

The feedback from participants in this study indicated that students' places of residence are not recognized as issues of much concern for faculty. It is extremely difficult to measure differences in attitudes when the variable of concern is not an issue for the subjects. This realization may indicate a problem of extreme importance to the student personnel profession. Have student personnel professionals overprojected the importance and impact of the issues of their profession for other sectors of the higher education community? Issues which have top priority for the student personnel profession may be perceived as of little concern by others. Possibly the profession has become so extra-curricular that it has lost touch with its impact on and relationship with the academic sector. If further evidence indicates this to be true, efforts to make the profession more of a collaborative member of the higher education community are needed. Maybe less student personnel research should be concerned with "in-house" concerns, and more with the profession's relation to the total academic community. It is there where the future of the profession will be decided.

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TABLE 1.

Instructions and Situations from the Situation Attitude Scale - Commuters

INSTRUCTIONS

This questionnaire is designed to measure how people think and feel about a number of academic, social and personal situations. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire is anonymous, so please DO NOT SIGN YOUR NAME.

Each item or situation is followed by 10 descriptive word scales. Your task is to select, for each descriptive scale, the rating which best describes YOUR feelings toward the item.

Sample item: A student flunks an exam.

empathetic ' A ' B ' C ' D ' E ' angry

You would indicate the direction and extent of your feelings (e.g., you might select B) by circling your choice 'B'. If the situation is not applicable, place yourself in the situation as best you can and respond to all items.

MAKE EACH ITEM A SEPARATE AND INDEPENDENT JUDGEMENT. Respond as honestly as you can without puzzling over individual items.

SITUATIONS

Form A

- 1) You are allocated money for a student assistantship that would require the student to work under little supervision and generate creative items for your organization. Only students living off-campus apply for the position.
- 2) You are eating your lunch and contemplating a research proposal when a commuter student sits down at your table and begins a conversation.
- 3) A student who has lived at home drops out of college to join the Peace Corps.
- 4) A student requests a two-week extension on a paper because she has decided to move out of her home.

Form B

- 1) You are allocated money for a student assistantship that would require the student to work under little supervision and generate creative items for your organization. Only students living on-campus apply for the position.
- 2) You are eating your lunch and contemplating a research proposal when a resident student sits down at your table and begins a conversation.
- 3) A student who has lived in the dorm drops out of college to join the Peace Corps.
- 4) A student requests a two-week extension on a paper because she has decided to move out of her dorm.

Form A

5) A student asks to borrow one of your "hard to come by" books so that she might read it in her apartment overnight.

6) A group of commuters stage a demonstration demanding more money for their programs.

Form B

5) A student asks to borrow one of your "hard to come by" books so that she might read it in her dorm overnight.

6) A group of resident students stage a demonstration demanding more money for their programs.

Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests for Forms A and B*

ITEM NO.	SITUATIONS** BIPOLAR ADJECTIVE DIMENSION	FORM A (N=73)		FORM B (N=68)		t***
		MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.	
I. Student-Student Relationship						
1)	good-bad	1.78	.92	1.81	1.18	-.16
2)	skeptical-enthusiastic	2.34	1.00	2.21	1.05	.79
3)	cautious-uncautious	1.96	.95	1.68	.89	1.82
4)	receptive-unreceptive	1.23	1.05	1.41	1.01	-1.03
5)	serious-humorous	1.48	.96	1.28	.88	1.29
6)	disturbed-undisturbed	2.70	1.06	2.53	1.17	.90
7)	threatened-neutral	3.30	.95	3.28	.88	.14
8)	interested-disinterested	1.08	1.06	.99	.99	.56
9)	favorable-unfavorable	1.37	1.12	1.38	1.12	-.07
10)	bored-excited	2.32	.88	2.49	.74	-1.24
II. Working-Lunch Conversation						
11)	anxious-at ease	2.78	1.13	2.99	1.14	-1.07
12)	indignant-understanding	3.07	.93	3.26	.80	-1.33
13)	suspicious-trusting	2.88	.96	3.29	.75	-2.84
14)	flattered-offended	1.56	.73	1.25	.78	2.46
15)	serious-humorous	1.85	.88	1.62	.88	1.56
16)	ridiculous-important	2.52	.73	2.69	.82	-1.31
17)	bad-good	2.67	.91	2.91	.88	-1.59
18)	surprised-not surprised	2.33	1.07	2.25	1.11	.43
19)	undisturbed-disturbed	1.41	1.03	1.15	1.03	1.53
20)	close-distant	1.82	.77	1.71	.73	.91
III. Drops College for Peace Corps						
21)	favorable-unfavorable	1.47	1.08	1.47	1.07	-.03
22)	bad-good	2.53	1.09	2.38	.93	.88
23)	unconcerned-concerned	2.49	.92	2.49	1.09	.05
24)	rejecting-accepting	2.92	.95	3.06	.83	-.94
25)	empathy-apathy	1.16	.93	1.09	.88	.50
26)	surprised-not surprised	2.16	.91	2.16	.91	.02
27)	hopeless-hopeful	2.81	.92	2.79	.78	.10
28)	anxious-calm	2.86	1.07	2.71	.81	.98
29)	displeased-pleased	2.49	.99	2.46	.94	.23
30)	cold-warm	2.70	.85	2.69	.87	.05
IV. Requests Extension on Paper						
31)	empathetic-apathetic	1.32	.98	1.62	1.02	-1.79
32)	stubborn-yielding	2.63	.89	2.24	1.08	2.38
33)	unconcerned-concerned	2.70	.97	2.72	.83	-.14
34)	happy-sad	2.08	.64	2.18	.62	-.89
35)	trusting-suspicious	1.68	1.03	1.93	1.07	-1.37

*Scale A to E (Numerical equivalent, 0 to 4)

**See Table 1 for complete situation

***All t values larger than 1.98 are significant beyond .05

TABLE 2.

Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests for Forms A and B*

ITEM NO.	SITUATIONS** BIPOLAR ADJECTIVE DIMENSION	FORM A (N=73)		FORM B (N=68)		t***
		MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.	
IV. Requests Extension on Paper						
36)	unfavorable-favorable	2.19	.97	1.87	1.05	1.91
37)	not surprised-surprised	1.78	.79	1.87	.90	-.61
38)	disappointed-pleased	1.93	.67	1.54	.66	3.45
39)	hostile-indifferent	2.27	.71	2.16	.77	.90
40)	cold-warm	2.40	.68	2.12	.78	2.27
V. Borrow a Book						
41)	complimented-insulted	1.33	.67	1.26	.80	.52
42)	angered-overjoyed	2.21	.58	2.40	.65	-1.85
43)	suspicious-trusting	2.74	.87	2.74	1.00	.03
44)	cooperative-uncooperative	.99	1.02	1.03	1.15	-.24
45)	threatened-neutral	3.15	.97	3.04	1.07	.62
46)	comfortable-uncomfortable	1.34	1.17	1.38	1.23	-.20
47)	unfavorable-favorable	2.34	1.07	2.99	1.06	-.84
48)	close-distant	1.58	.73	1.40	.76	1.43
49)	unaccepting-accepting	2.99	.91	3.00	.96	-.09
50)	empathy-indifferent	1.23	.92	.94	.77	2.03
VI. Demonstration						
51)	favorable-unfavorable	1.93	1.10	1.84	1.11	.50
52)	apathetic-empathetic	2.33	1.00	2.41	.92	-.51
53)	unresentful-resentful	1.55	1.16	1.72	1.05	-.93
54)	proud-indignant	1.97	.75	2.00	.75	-.27
55)	indifferent-hostile	1.66	1.03	1.76	.87	-.77
56)	unjustified-justified	2.36	.92	2.26	.86	.01
57)	humorous-serious	2.34	.93	2.46	.85	-.75
58)	anxious-calm	2.82	1.03	2.28	.93	3.27
59)	disappointed-elated	1.95	.64	2.00	.67	-.50
60)	unexpected-expected	2.37	.70	2.26	.79	.84

*Scale A to E (Numerical equivalent, 0 to 4)

**See Table I for complete situation.

***All t values larger than 1.98 are significant beyond .05